

A Quite Madness



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Not Quite Living

In a corner of Pabna where the trees whispered louder than the people, Ujjal sat on the floor of his old house, unmoving. Outside, crows picked at the edge of a bamboo fence, and the wind dragged dust along the path like a funeral procession that never ended. The ceiling fan spun lazily above him, slicing heat into pieces too small to matter.

The house was his. At least on paper. His name wasn't on anything, not the deeds, not the accounts, not even the electric bill. But it was where he was born, where his mother sang lullabies about rivers and moons, and where her voice was silenced by a road that didn't stop for grief.

He hadn't crossed a street since the accident.

There was no rhythm to Ujjal's days anymore. Morning, noon, evening—each folded into the next like wet clothes clumped in a bucket. He didn't eat when he was hungry. He ate when someone made him. He didn't speak unless spoken to, and even then, it was never clear if he was answering or just thinking aloud.

People in the village said he was mad.

But madness is never the full truth. Madness is a name people give when they're afraid to look closer.

Ujjal had once been a bright child. Not just bright—brilliant. He could memorize Quranic verses and math tables with equal ease. His teachers praised him. Neighbors pointed to him as a “future something”—doctor, officer, maybe even a professor like his cousin in Rajshahi.

But brilliance can crack. Especially when it's soft and young and mother-shaped.

His mother, Farhana, had gone out to buy him mangoes that day. She had smiled before leaving. He remembered the way she adjusted her orna, the slight redness at the edge of her eyes—maybe from chopping onions. He remembered the sound of the truck's horn, the way it shattered the calm, the way the entire village ran, the way no one would look at him.

She died before he could say goodbye. And that is a kind of death a child never heals from.

The door creaked open.

Ohona stepped in, wiping sweat from her forehead, books tucked under her arm, her voice hoarse from hours of yelling at children who couldn't spell their own names. A full-time teacher, barely part-time human. She carried the burden of family like a bag she never packed but was asked to hold.

Fariz had called her, three years ago, voice low and tired over the phone:

“Look after him. I’ll send money. Please.”

She hadn’t said yes. She just didn’t say no.

Now, she stood in his house every day, tired before she even entered, placing lunch on the table as if it mattered.

“You didn’t eat breakfast again,” she said, placing the covered plate down gently. Rice. Mashed pumpkin. A piece of fish.

Ujjal said nothing.

Ohona looked at him. His hair was longer than it should be. He didn’t comb it. His eyes stared at the floor, like it might disappear. There was something unsettling about his silence—not peaceful, but unfinished.

“I’ll leave this here. Eat when you feel like it,” she said.

She turned to go, but then came his voice—dry, thin, barely tethered to reality.

“They said you steal the money Fariz sends.”

She stopped, her spine stiffening just slightly. The same rumor, the same voice, now coming from the very mouth she fed.

“I don’t touch your money,” she replied, not sharply, just tired.

“They said... you want me dead.”

Her lips trembled. She pressed them shut.

“Do you?” he asked, looking up for the first time.

His eyes weren’t angry. Just lost. A boy calling for his mother in a forest that had already burned down.

“No, Ujjal,” she said. “I want you fed. And clean. And left alone.”

Outside, the village lived its small, ordinary life.

Men smoked near tea stalls. Children chased dogs. Women whispered over wet saris.

And all of them knew Ujjal’s story.

Or thought they did.

Before The Silence

The village was younger then.

The mango trees were fuller, the skies bluer, and the mornings sang with laughter. Ujjal was not a ghost in those days but a boy with stars in his eyes and dreams that stretched wider than the river.

He had a mind that devoured books and a heart that beat too fiercely to be caged by the dusty school walls. The teachers called him a prodigy. His classmates, a quiet king.

But his true kingdom was at home.

Farhana, his mother, was the sun in his sky.

Her hands were always busy—chopping vegetables, sewing clothes, or soothing a fevered brow. Her voice was gentle and fierce, the kind that could both calm storms and ignite fires.

She told Ujjal stories of brave rivers that never gave up, of the moon's quiet persistence in the night sky. She believed in him so fiercely that even the cracked walls of their home seemed to glow with hope.

One day, under the swaying branches of the neem tree, Ujjal showed his mother a poem he had written. His voice was trembling, but his eyes shone.

“Maa, listen,” he whispered.

Farhana smiled, her eyes softening.

“The river runs fast and wild,
But finds the sea at last.
So do I, my dreams untamed,
To find my place, my name.”

She kissed his forehead.

“You will, baba. You will.”

Ujjal asked , “ Where is father Ma? “

She replied ,” He is far from us “

Ujjal asked “ When will he return? “

Silence prevailed

She said “ Soon “ with teary eyes covered that Ujjal never saw

But fate is a crooked river
It bends, it twists, and it drowns.

That afternoon, Farhana left to buy mangoes for Ujjal's favorite sweet dish. She wore her best saree, the one embroidered with tiny golden threads that caught the sunlight.

Ujjal waited by the window, eyes scanning the dusty road for her return.

The truck came fast.

The horn blared sharp.

A scream tore the air.

The village froze.

Ujjal ran outside, feet pounding the earth like a drum of desperation.

He found her on the ground, blood blooming like a dark flower around her.

She reached out, fingers trembling.

He grabbed her hand.

But the world slipped away, swallowed by sirens and shadows.

From that moment, the river of his life stopped flowing.

The boy who chased dreams vanished beneath the weight of silence.

His laughter was replaced by shadows.

His heart by emptiness.

And so, Ujjal sat in the same house years later, staring into the dust, waiting for a light that had long gone out.

The Broken Mind

Ujjal's mind was a labyrinth with no exit.

Each thought twisted and folded over the other, sharp edges hidden beneath a fragile veil of calm. The world was a tangled web—loud, confusing, and cruel.

He remembered faces, but not names. Words, but not meaning. Moments, but not why.

Sometimes, he felt nothing but an aching void. Other times, a fire raged—anger without direction, sorrow without tears.

Loneliness clung to him like a second skin, tighter than any cloth. It was not just the absence of people—it was the feeling of being unseen, unheard, unwanted.

He wanted someone to stay.

To speak.

To hold.

To break the silence.

He didn't understand himself. Did he want kindness? Or distance? Love? Or to be left alone?

His emotions were a storm without a map.

Sometimes, he found brief relief in wandering the village paths. Talking to strangers, not because he trusted them, but because the noise filled the hollowness.

At other times, he lashed out—sharp words, reckless actions, pushing away the very hands that tried to help.

He hated the roads. Each step toward the street was a step closer to the day that had shattered his world.

Crossing the road was a challenge—a mountain he could not climb.

His brother, Fariz, sent money from Dhaka. Enough to keep him fed, clothed, and under a roof.

But Fariz did not come often. He had his own life—married, two children, a new wife, a job filled with endless meetings and calls.

Fariz loved Ujjal in the quiet way of brothers separated by miles and wounds.

He trusted Ohona, their cousin and a teacher, to look after Ujjal. Ohona was kind, disciplined, but burdened. She took care of him because family was family, but she was not a nurse, not a mother—just a guardian by obligation.

Ujjal knew none of this clearly.

The whispers of the village twisted the truth.

They said Fariz was selfish, that he stole Ujjal's inheritance, that he abandoned his brother to rot.

Ujjal heard it, believed it, repeated it.

He told Ohona the same—sometimes accusing her of withholding food, sometimes blaming her for everything wrong.

It was a shield and a sword—a way to make sense of the chaos inside.

In the quiet moments, when no one was watching, Ujjal's mind trembled.

He feared death. Not because he wanted to die, but because he feared nothing after.

He dreamed of a life where someone would hold his hand, where loneliness didn't gnaw at his bones.

But those dreams always slipped away, leaving him with the cold reality of empty rooms and voices that vanished when he looked for them.

Those Who Stayed Those Who Couldn't

Fariz never wanted to leave Pabna.

But life, as it always does, had other plans.

After their mother's death, it was Fariz who arranged the funeral, sold the cows, paid the debts, and closed the house's accounts. Ujjal was too young then, too numb to understand what had shattered. He simply wandered the yard barefoot, murmuring Farhana's name, refusing to come inside once the light fell.

Fariz was twenty-two when he moved to Dhaka. A job came—small, then steady. A wife, a daughter. For a while, it seemed like a new life had begun. But even there, sorrow followed. After four years, he lost them both. A gas cylinder leak. Silence where there once was laughter.

He remarried out of necessity. Two sons came. A quieter life resumed.

But Ujjal never left his thoughts.

Each month, Fariz sent money back to Pabna. More than enough. He spoke to Ohona regularly—checking in, asking if Ujjal had eaten, if he'd said anything strange, if the neighbors were interfering again.

Ohona would sigh through the line, her voice firm but fraying.

"He wanders again. Told the grocer I'm poisoning his food. Called my husband corrupt last week. Brother fariz, this is not sustainable."

"I know," Fariz would say. "But what can I do from here?"

"Come home," she said once. "Just for a few days."

Fariz didn't answer.

Dhaka was easier. Distance diluted guilt.

Ohona wasn't a mother, but sometimes, she felt like one. She taught over seventy students in school, and when she came home, Ujjal was like the seventy-first—older, but more lost.

She cooked for him, reminded him to bathe, cleaned his bed when he forgot, listened when he ranted. She bore his accusations like a post bears the storm—still, but slowly cracking.

The villagers didn't help.

They spoke with knowing smiles and poison in their teeth.

“She’s living off Fariz’s money,” they whispered.

“She’ll get his land someday if she’s clever.”

“Oh, she’s not his sister, you know... cousins marry sometimes.”

Ohona kept her head down, but her ears burned.

One evening, after school, she came home to find Ujjal standing in the yard, staring at nothing. His hair was wet. His shirt was torn.

“Where have you been?” she asked.

“Was helping Ratan carry bricks,” he muttered.

“Why?”

“He said he’d give me cakes.”

Her jaw clenched.

Ratan was a land broker. Everyone knew he used Ujjal to carry messages, clean his goatshed, do errands for nothing but empty praise and stale snacks. Like many others in the village, he found Ujjal useful—not as a person, but a tool.

Ohona pulled him inside.

“You are not their servant,” she said sharply.

“But they talk to me,” he replied.

She didn’t know what to say to that.

Because it was true.

They talked to him.

And then they laughed behind his back.

And then they asked why he was so broken.

Fariz sent more money that month. Told Ohona to buy Ujjal a new fan, better medicine, maybe even a fridge.

She did everything—receipts and all.

But the villagers didn’t stop.

Ujjal told the shopkeeper that Fariz was trying to starve him. That Ohona was stealing from him. That no one loved him.

That night, Ohona broke down. Not loudly. Not in tears. But in the silence between tasks—standing in front of the stove, staring into the steam rising from a pot of rice.

“I can’t do this forever,” she whispered to no one.

And Ujjal?

He sat in the back room, alone, carving shapes into the wooden floor with a spoon.

He didn’t know what he was carving. He didn’t know why.

He just wanted someone to stay.

Someone who wouldn’t leave.

Someone who wouldn’t listen to the village.

Someone who saw him not as a burden...

...but as a human.

Whispers Beneath the Banyan

Reshma came from the next village, wrapped in softness and shadows.

They called her Reshma—a woman with kohl-lined eyes and a voice that bent like silk in the wind.

She claimed her aunt lived nearby, though no one could quite place the name.

Often, she lingered near the sweet shop where Ujjal sometimes sat, staring at laddus he never bought.

One afternoon, she smiled at him.

Not politely. Not with the distant pity the world had grown used to giving him.

But truly. Gently. Like he was someone.

Ujjal froze—no one had smiled at him like that in years.

They spoke again the next day, and the next.

By the fourth afternoon, she sat beside him under the old banyan tree and said softly,

“You’re different, Ujjal. You have depth.”

No one had ever told him that before.

She spoke of stars and loneliness, of the cruel blindness of a village that could not understand a mind like his.

She told him the village was full of liars, and that he deserved a woman who could see beyond their venom.

She said things he longed to believe.

“I don’t care about your money,” she whispered once, brushing her fingers near his wrist.

“I just want peace. Someone who understands pain.”

He stared at her, and for the first time in years, the storm inside him stilled.

Just for a moment.

But the village, with its sharp tongues and sharper eyes, was never silent for long.

“She’s eyeing his inheritance,” one uncle hissed at the tea stall.

“She’s been married before—ask around.”

“She targets the weak. It’s disgusting.”

“Ohona must be blind to let this happen.”

Ohona was not blind.

She had watched Reshma closely—the way she lingered too long, smiled too precisely, listened too closely.

So she called Fariz.

“She’s playing him,” Ohona warned.

“And he’s falling fast.”

Fariz, already weighed down by his own battles, was silent for a long moment.

Then he asked, “What does she want?”

“She wants to marry him.”

Fariz sighed heavily. “No.”

“She’s clever. If he marries her, she’ll gain access to his name, his property.”

“He doesn’t even own the house,” Fariz muttered. “It’s still under our mother’s name.”

“She doesn’t know that,” Ohona said quietly. “But she will.”

The truth behind the tangled roots of their family was more painful than anyone said aloud.

After Rihab’s transfer to Dhaka, Rihab had found himself caught between two worlds—between the quiet village life he left behind and the glimmering ambitions of the capital.

Farhana waited in Pabna, silent and hopeful, unaware of the slow unraveling of promises.

In Dhaka, Rihab met Tasnim—young, ambitious, and tied to families who could open doors he never dreamed of before.

What began as work soon became dinners, whispered conversations beneath city lights, and finally a quiet marriage.

Farhana’s letters went unanswered.

Her name became a ghost in his life.

When Rihab finally returned to Pabna, it was not to reclaim his past but with Tasnim and their daughter—Reshma—his new life, his erased history.

Years later, Reshma saw Ujjal—not as a brother, but as a shadow threatening the fragile life her father had built.

A mentally ill man still holding a claim to the family’s forgotten legacy.

To her, he was a threat to the life she knew, to the security that meant everything.

One day, she fed him leftovers—food too old, too sour to nourish.

To teach him his place.

Fate would reveal the full weight of that act

When Ohona visited Ujjal that morning with fresh food, her tone was firm.

“She’s not coming here again.”

Ujjal’s eyes widened.

“Why? Are you jealous?”

Ohona blinked, stunned.

“She loves me. Not like you. Not like Fariz. She wants to stay. You all want me gone.”

“No, Ujjal,” Ohona said softly.

“She wants what you have. Not who you are.”

His anger broke through.

He threw the plate across the room, lentils splattering the walls.

“You hate me.”

“No,” Ohona said quietly.

“I will protect you. Sometimes that means keeping the wolves out.”

Days later, Reshma vanished.

No goodbyes, no farewells.

Just silence where once there was sugar.

Ujjal waited beneath the banyan tree for hours,

but she did not return.

He sat on the dirt and cried—not loudly, not like a child, but with a vast emptiness that made the earth seem too wide, too hollow.

That night, in the dark, he asked Ohona a question that hung between them like a ghost.

“Why does everyone leave?”

Ohona said nothing.

She sat beside the door, listening to the crickets scream into the night.

The Weight Of Two Life's

Fariz lived in a small flat in Mohammadpur—three rooms, a balcony, and too many memories. The walls were a pale green that always looked slightly sick. His second wife, Tania, kept it neat, but no matter how many curtains she hung or air fresheners she sprayed, it never smelled like home.

Because Fariz's real home was still in Pabna.
And part of him had never left.

He worked at a government office—Accounts Section. Eight hours a day under flickering tube lights, surrounded by worn-out chairs and people who smiled without meaning it. His desk was cluttered with files no one ever wanted to open.

Each morning, he walked past a school where children rushed in with crumpled uniforms and noisy shoes. He couldn't look at them for long. They reminded him of someone he'd lost.

His daughter—Zara—would have been twelve by now.

Sometimes, when Tania wasn't home, he'd unlock the bottom drawer of his cupboard and take out Zara's old storybook. "Shonali Pakhir Desh." The yellow bird land. She used to make him read it every night.

After the accident, he buried the book in a drawer. But some nights, he opened it again. Just to see her name written on the first page, in crayon, in shaky hands:
"Jannatul Islam Zara"

Tania never asked questions. She had come into his life after the fire, after the funerals, after the silence. She brought warmth, but not magic. She bore two sons and cooked with care. But there was always a door in Fariz's heart she couldn't open.

Ujjal stood behind that door.

Every month, he sent money. Sometimes more than he could afford.
Every time his phone rang late at night, his heart seized.
He imagined police, hospitals, maybe even a suicide.

He wanted to bring Ujjal to Dhaka once—but the moment Ujjal saw the roads, he panicked. Started crying, yelling, saying the cars were coming to kill him. It took hours to calm him down.

He never tried again.

Fariz carried guilt like a second spine.

Guilt for leaving.
Guilt for not being enough.
Guilt for having a life while Ujjal barely had days.

Once, while rocking his youngest son to sleep, he whispered:

“Your uncle is a good man. He’s just... tired inside.”

Tania heard him.

She didn’t say anything. Just placed a warm hand on his back, and for a moment, he felt lighter.

But it didn’t last.

Because a week later, he got the call.

Ohona, breathless on the other end:

“Ujjal isn’t eating. His skin’s yellowing. He vomited blood last night.”

Fariz’s blood ran cold.

“What did the doctors say?”

“We haven’t gone. He won’t move.”

“I’m coming,” Fariz said, standing before he even hung up.

The Consequence

Fariz hadn't walked through the gates of that house in years.

But now he stood in front of it again—his childhood home, cracked walls half-covered in moss, the bamboo fence leaning like a drunk old man. The air smelled like boiled rice, damp clothes, and the quiet rot of forgotten places.

He knocked softly, but no one answered.

Then he stepped inside.

Ujjal was lying on the floor, thin as a shadow, eyes half-open, body wrapped in a discolored lungi. A bowl of untouched rice sat beside him, already cold, already crusting over. His breathing was shallow.

Ohona stood nearby, arms crossed, worry carved deep into her brow. She looked like she hadn't slept in two days.

"I tried," she said. "He refused to go. He said it's just 'bad food.'"

Fariz didn't reply. He knelt down beside Ujjal and touched his forehead.

Burning.

Ujjal opened his eyes slowly.

"You came," he whispered.

"Yes," Fariz said.

"Am I dying?"

Fariz's throat clenched, but he nodded once. "Not if we go now."

They took him to Pabna General first. The doctor there frowned, scribbled something in a notepad, then whispered to Fariz, "Better take him to Dhaka. This is bigger than what we can handle."

And so, for the second time in his life, Ujjal crossed the roads he feared so deeply.

In the back of a rented ambulance, he wept—not from pain, but from fear.

"The cars will kill me," he whispered over and over.

Fariz held his hand the whole ride.

The diagnosis came after two days of waiting.

Stage 1 stomach cancer.

Not the worst. Not hopeless.

But fragile. Like a candle in the wind.

The treatment would take months—medication, supervision, therapy. The doctor asked, “Do you have a family who can help him through this?”

Fariz didn’t hesitate.

“Yes,” he said. “He has me.”

Back in Pabna, the news spread faster than wind in dry fields.

Some wept loudly in public, announcing how much they “cared.”

Some shook their heads at tea stalls, saying, “I always knew something was wrong with that boy.”

But when Fariz asked for help—watching over him, staying a night, running errands—
No one showed up.

Except Ohona.

She took leave from school for a week.

She sat beside Ujjal when the nausea came.

She cooked bland food and coaxed him to eat.

She washed his stained clothes when he was too weak to get up.

He never thanked her.

But one night, when he thought she was asleep, he said to the ceiling:

“Why do you stay?”

She didn’t answer.

But she smiled quietly, in the dark.

A month passed.

Ujjal slowly began to improve.

The medicines worked. The vomiting stopped.

The color returned to his skin.

One afternoon, he stood up without help.

The village noticed.

But instead of relief, they birthed a new poison.

“They say Ohona didn’t take him to a better hospital on purpose.”

“She wanted him dead so Fariz would blame the cancer, not her.”

“I heard Fariz spends lakhs, but she only gives him paracetamol and boiled rice.”

“I bet she hides half the money.”

And Ujjal, fragile, scared, and confused—
He believed them.

One morning, he looked at Ohona and said,
“You... you let me suffer.”

She blinked.

“People told me,” he continued. “You kept me here so I’d die and you could take everything.”

Ohona didn’t speak.

She simply folded the corner of a towel, stood up, and left the room.

She didn’t return for hours.

That night, Ujjal had a dream.

He was walking on a road.

A truck’s headlights appeared far away.

And his mother, Farhana, stood on the other side, waving.

He called out, but she didn’t answer.

He walked closer.

The truck came faster.

He froze.

And just before the light consumed him—
He woke up screaming.

Ohona returned home

The kitchen was warm with steam and silence.

Ohona stood at the stove, stirring lentils. Her son, Fahim, leaned against the doorway, arms folded.

“Ma... why do you keep doing this?” he asked.

She didn’t turn. “Doing what?”

“You’ve got school all morning, chores all evening, and now... him. He’s not even our responsibility.”

The spoon paused. The bubbles hissed.

Her husband entered, voice low but steady:

“He’s not a child anymore. Fariz sends money. Why should you carry everything alone?”

Ohona placed the spoon down.

“I do it because no one else will. And because once, when no one cared for me, Fariz’s mother fed me with her own hands. This... is not charity. It’s memory.”

Fahim looked away. Her younger son mumbled, “But he said things about Abbu. Bad things. Everyone talks.”

She turned to face them.

“Yes,” she said quietly.

“He says things he doesn’t mean. Because his world is noise and fear and broken clocks. And if we abandon him too, what are we then? Just another rumor with legs.”

No one replied.

Later that night, her husband brought her tea without a word.

That was his apology.

And she drank it, tired but unmoved.

Fate

Ujjal recovered.

The vomiting stopped.

The pain dulled.

The doctor declared it a success.

“You were lucky. Stage One is curable.”

But Ujjal didn't feel lucky.

He felt like a man given a second life without a reason to live it.

After the diagnosis, people changed—
not in truth, but in mask.

Neighbors who once ignored him now waved politely.
Shopkeepers gave small discounts with fake smiles.
Old women in the lane whispered prayers loud enough for others to hear.

But kindness born from pity is cruelty in disguise.

And Ujjal knew.

Ohona returned to school.

Fariz returned to Dhaka.

And Ujjal... returned to the same rooms, the same shadows, the same emptiness.

But something had changed.

Ever since the dream—
his mother across the road, the truck, the silence—
he woke each day with a countdown ticking in his bones.

He didn't say it aloud.
But he marked the days.

One.

Two.

Three...

Forty days later would be the anniversary of Farhana's death.
Same date. Same hour.

And in some secret corner of his mind, Ujjal believed:
That's the day I'll die too.

He told the barber in the market.

"I saw her. She was calling me."

The barber smiled politely. "You'll live a hundred years."

But the man who knows his own end doesn't need comfort.
He needs peace.

And Ujjal found none.

On day 30

Ten days remained until the anniversary of Farhana's death.

The road had taken her.

The same road Ujjal still couldn't cross without trembling.

That morning, he called Fariz.

The line crackled with the usual static of village air.

"Bhaiya," he said softly. "Will you come? This year... I want to go. To see her. Properly."

Fariz paused.

The office was loud. Papers. Children. A soft cough from one of the twins in the other room.

"I'll come," he said.

Day 40

Fariz called Ujjal said,

"I may arrive late in the evening go to mother's graveyard without me"

Fariz packed a bag and left for Pabna, boarding the 7:15 bus from Shyamoli.

The sky was heavy, windless.

He sat by the window, half-asleep, the world sliding past in streaks of gray and green.

The afternoon Ujjal wore clean cloths , clean shoes and headed to his mother's graveyard

Hours later, as the bus approached the village border,
a crowd gathered in the dust.

There had been a crash.

A man on foot.

A familiar figure thrown to the roadside, blood blooming like red lilies against the gravel.

When Fariz stepped off the bus, the world shifted.

He recognized the road.

Recognized the shoes.

Someone was crying.

Someone whispered:

"That's the brother. The one who called him."

Fariz staggered.

The bag in his hand slipped.

He stood in silence while the wind finally moved through the trees,
and the road swallowed another piece of him whole.

That night, after they lowered the boy into silence, Fariz returned to the house alone.
Fariz stood alone in the room where Ujjal once sat.

The fan creaked overhead.

The walls still carried the smell of old lentils and dust.

Nothing had changed—

except that the silence now had weight.

He picked up a shirt from the corner.

Still folded.

Still clean.

Never worn.

A gift from him.

Ujjal had said, *"Maybe later."*

Later never came.

He remembered Ujjal laughing once, barefoot in the rain, chasing a broken kite.

He stared at the floor, at the faint scratches where Ujjal had carved lines with a spoon.

He hadn't known what they meant.

Now he saw—
They weren't lines.
They were days.

Counted.
Marked.
Waited for.

Fariz lied down the same rusty and dusty bed of Ujjal,

He had buried three people,
but what he really buried were parts of himself.

He was young when his mother died.
He remembered her laugh, her hands soaked in oil after frying rice cakes,
the way she combed his hair before school even when they were running late.
And then one day — gone.
Metal and road and screams.

He became the man overnight.
Not because he wanted to.
Because he had to.

He held Ujjal's hand at the funeral.
His brother had stopped speaking for weeks

Then came his wife.
A sudden accident. A hospital's blinking light.
A child lost with her —
his daughter, who never opened her eyes to the world.
He held them both before the machines went flat.

He never cried that day.
He just stood in the hospital corridor, watching a nurse mop the floor.

And now — Ujjal.
Mad, lost, troublesome, unpredictable.
But still *his brother*.
Still the boy who once held his hand too tightly in crowds.
Still the boy who waited for him to return.

And Fariz had been late.

He had missed it.

He had promised he would come.

He had a car, a house, a desk full of files, a wife who cooked well.
Children who called him *Baba*.

His body carried names —
his mother, his first love, his only brother.

All the ones he couldn't save.
All the ones who had left him behind in different ways.

He sat alone and whispered to the silence:
"How many more must I carry?"

But no one answered.
Only the ceiling fan, spinning above his head,
like time,
like fate,
like grief with nowhere to go.

The same people who once said "he's mad" now said "he was misunderstood."
The same people who said "he's a burden" now said "he was special."
They spoke well of him now.

Now that he was no longer here.

Ohona stood by his grave as the final prayers were whispered.

And when all had gone, she knelt down and whispered,

"You were never the mad one, Ujjal.
They were."

Tania called Fariz that evening.

"Come back," she said gently. "The boys miss you."

He said he would.
But not yet.

That night, under a sky heavy with clouds, Fariz lit a candle and placed it on the windowsill.

Not for prayer.

Not for tradition.

Just for memory.

For the boy who feared roads.

For the mind that broke too early.

For the love that wasn't enough.

And for the world that watched him die—

then said,

“He was such a quiet soul.”

Ohona came the next morning.

She didn't knock.

She had a key, and she had earned it.

She moved through the house slowly, like someone entering a memory.

She looked at the empty bed, the untouched food, the broom leaning by the door.

Then she sat where Ujjal once carved his days.

She ran her fingers across the shallow lines.

And whispered,

“You were never mad.”

Not broken,

Not dangerous,

Not cursed.

Just alone.

Just too human for this world.

She didn't cry.

She had done all her crying in silence, in the kitchen, in the gaps between her sentences.

But when she stood to leave, she left one thing behind—

a notebook.

Blank, except for the first page.

***“For Ujjal,
who was more than they could see.”***

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